



BEAVERHEAD RIVER DRAINAGE

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Beaverhead River originates at the outlet of Clark Canyon Reservoir, an irrigation storage facility constructed by the BOR in 1964, and flows 79.5 miles before joining the Big Hole River to form the Jefferson River. Directly downstream from Clark Canyon Dam, the river flows through a canyon for 16 miles, before entering the broad, open Beaverhead Valley. At Point of Rocks, the river passes through a narrow constriction, then continues for about 20 miles through a wide, gently sloping valley to its confluence with the Big Hole River. The river drains an area of approximately 5,000 square miles. A large portion of the drainage consists of rugged mountains ranging from 9,000 to 11,000 feet in elevation. The river elevation at the dam outlet is 5,450 ft, and at the mouth is 4,600 ft. Major tributaries entering the river in downstream progression are: Grasshopper, Rattlesnake and Blacktail Deer creeks, and the Ruby River.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

The Beaverhead River basin contains fish species common to Southwestern Montana. These species include: rainbow trout, brown trout, brook trout, hybrid westslope cutthroat trout, westslope cutthroat trout (primarily in isolated tributaries), mountain whitefish, burbot, common carp, longnose dace, longnose sucker, Rocky Mountain sculpin, and white sucker.

Although the Beaverhead River basin was historically stocked with hatchery fish, stocking in the rivers and streams was discontinued by the early 1970s, and wild trout management philosophies were initiated. Between the 1930s and 1960s, the Beaverhead River was stocked with rainbow trout, cutthroat trout (undesignated as to which sub-species), and brown trout. Arctic grayling have also been stocked into the Ruby River basin during the late 1990s and the early 2000s as part of a FWP restoration program. The stocking was discontinued in 2002, and no natural reproduction has been subsequently detected through annual sampling. Rainbow trout have been stocked annually into Clark Canyon Reservoir since 1964.

The Beaverhead River is managed under Central District Standard regulations for the entire river with a few exceptions. Only one rainbow trout may be counted in the combined trout limit, and angling is closed from Clark Canyon Dam to Pipe Organ Bridge from 1 December until the third Saturday in May.

Angling pressure is high on the Beaverhead River downstream from Clark Canyon Dam. Angling effort has varied from 14,574 angler days in 2001 to 38,706 angler days in 2009. On average, over half of the angler days logged on the Beaverhead River are from non-resident anglers.

HABITAT

Throughout much of the Beaverhead River's length, it is confined to a single channel. Mean channel widths range from about 83 feet near the dam to about 93 feet near the mouth. The gradient is gentle, averaging 12 feet per mile. Willow is the dominant bank vegetation. In the upper river, the streambed consists primarily of rubble, gravel and sand. In addition to the above,

silt is a common component of the streambed in the lower river. Fish cover primarily consists of submerged and overhanging bank vegetation, undercut banks, and long, deep pools.

Clark Canyon Reservoir and irrigation diversions affect the flow pattern of the Beaverhead River. Prior to the construction of the reservoir, much of the lower river was severely dewatered during the summer irrigation season. In general, reservoir management has resulted in higher flows in the lower river during the historically low flow months of May, July, August and September. However, much of the lower 64 miles still suffer from dewatering. In recent years, sections of the lower river have been totally dry. Massive withdrawals of irrigation water have virtually eliminated high water flows in the lower river. During periods of drought, the upper river is now severely affected by low flow releases during the non-irrigation season when water is being stored for the following year.

FISHING ACCESS

The Beaverhead River primarily flows through private lands. Access to the river is readily obtained through some private lands, publicly owned access sites, and at bridge crossings. Floating is popular during the fishing and waterfowl seasons.

Seven FASs exist on the Beaverhead River between Clark Canyon Dam and Dillon, Montana. Opportunities for developing additional Fishing Access Sites downstream of Dillon are a high priority.

SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks works closely with the BOR on operations of Clark Canyon Dam, in particular concerning the need for greater overwinter flows downstream of the dam.

Given the popularity of the Beaverhead River, angling is managed with social rules (regulations) to minimize social crowding issues. These rules prohibit angling by non-resident anglers and outfitters during particular times of the year and in specific sections.

The Beaverhead River drainage is home to several conservation populations of westslope cutthroat trout providing opportunities to conserve this native species in the drainage. The goal of cutthroat conservation work is to secure populations in habitat that is free from the threats of non-native species and much of this work will be done upstream of natural and man-made fish barriers. A cutthroat trout population is considered secure when it has a minimum population size of 2,500 fish, occupies at least 5-6 miles of stream and is free from the threats of competition and hybridization from non-native species. The long-term goal of cutthroat conservation in the Beaverhead is to have 20% of the historically occupied habitat restored to cutthroat trout.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT DIRECTION FOR THE BEAVERHEAD DRAINAGE

Water	Miles/acres	Species	Origin	Management Type	Management Direction
Beaverhead River	75 miles	Brown trout, Rainbow trout	Wild	Quality/ Special regulations	Maintain present numbers and sizes. Consider increasing angler harvest to reduce numbers if necessary to maintain fish growth
		Mountain whitefish	Wild	General	Continue to manage harvest to support viable populations
Habitat needs and activities: Develop an instream flow management plan that optimizes fisheries benefits and irrigation needs to secure 1) improved winter flows upstream of Barretts Diversion and 2) improved summer flows downstream of Barretts Diversion. Develop a sediment transport model to determine the magnitude and duration of flows required to convey fine sediment through the reach between Clark Canyon Dam and Barretts Diversion. Develop and implement an alternative to reduce or eliminate the effects of sediment delivery from the North Fork of Clark Canyon Creek.					
Beaverhead River Drainage Tributaries	491 miles	Westslope cutthroat trout	Wild	Conservation	Continue native species conservation to maintain or create viable, genetically unaltered, self-sustaining populations
		Hybridized cutthroat trout, Rainbow trout, Brown trout, Brook trout, Mountain whitefish	Wild	General	Maintain present numbers and sizes. Consider increasing angler harvest to reduce numbers if necessary to maintain fish growth. Modify as necessary to ensure they are not limiting the viability of westslope cutthroat trout populations
Habitat needs and activities: Secure and replicate extant genetically unaltered westslope cutthroat trout populations and create meta-populations of westslope cutthroat trout in accordance with existing conservation plans. Initiate localized and watershed-scale restoration projects to achieve TMDL compliance on 303d listed streams. Develop instream flow improvements and plans in areas of need.					
Poindexter Slough	6 miles	Brown trout, Rainbow trout, Mountain whitefish	Wild	General	Maintain present numbers and sizes. Consider increasing angler harvest to reduce numbers if necessary to maintain fish growth
Habitat needs and activities: Reconfigure upstream headgate to the Beaverhead River to allow adequate flow to support 1) fisheries and irrigation needs and 2) periodic flushing flows to mobilize fine sediment through the system to maintain high quality habitat. Implement active channel restoration techniques to size channel appropriate to contemporary flow volumes to create self-maintaining high quality habitat. Develop a flow management plan that optimizes fisheries benefits and irrigation needs to 1) maintain minimum instream flows during summer, 2) formalize use of periodic flushing flows to mobilize convey fine sediment through the system and, 3) maximize reliance on accreted flows to enhance the spring creek character of Poindexter Slough to the extent possible.					

Water	Miles/acres	Species	Origin	Management Type	Management Direction
Mountain Lakes	12 lakes 135 acres	Westslope cutthroat trout, Hybridized cutthroat trout, Yellowstone cutthroat trout, Rainbow trout, Brook trout,	Wild/ Hatchery	Put- Take/ General	Continue to manage stocking and harvest to maintain fish sizes and numbers